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RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR A.J. AYER

by

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The three terms, *inner*, *private* and *mental* recur in Sir Alfred's discussion. I believe it is fair to say that, in the context of his paper, all three are used interchangeably. This is where all the trouble begins.

Thus, with reference to that particular feeling referred to as a tweak, which I feel when my shoe pinches (p.133), I am sure Sir Alfred would say it is *private* (meaning that it can be felt by no one but me), that it is an *inner* state (meaning that it cannot be observed by others the way, e.g., rashes and twitches can be observed), and that it is *mental* (meaning, God knows what, other than that it is not physical).

Now it appears to be Sir Alfred's view that if a state of a person, or his foot, is in the sense private, then it is *ipso facto* both inner and mental; that any such inner state is, *ipso facto*, both mental and private; and that any mental state is, likewise, both inner and private. His criticism of Ryle's philosophy appears to rest largely on the interchangeability of these three undefined terms.

Thus, it being apparent that Ryle does quite clearly repudiate an absolute distinction of kind between the mental and the physical, Sir Alfred takes this as equivalent to repudiating any "inner" life, and likewise, as rejecting the claim of privacy for certain of one's thoughts and feelings. Hence, Sir Alfred appears to believe that it is a strong point against Ryle if it can be "shown" that a man does have an inner life, consisting of thoughts, feelings, etc., which are accordingly private. Being inner and private, it is assumed that they must also be mental, whatever that might mean.

I believe this largely misses the point. It is obvious that Ryle does not deny the common distinction between inner and outer. No one does, though it is not entirely clear what "inner" means in this context. Again Ryle certainly does not deny the distinction between private and public. That is, he does not deny that a man's feelings are felt by no one but himself, whereas certain other of his states, such as trembling or perspiring, can be observed as easily by others as by himself. These distinctions, therefore—namely, those of inner and outer, and private and public—are not questioned. Certainly no one is called upon to *show* that a man's thoughts and feelings are both inner and private. What Ryle does deny is that these distinctions entail still another; namely, that between minds and bodies or, what really comes to the same thing, between the mental and the physical.

It does not appear to me that Sir Alfred anywhere shows that Ryle is wrong about this. That is, he does not show that the first two distinctions do imply the third. Indeed, he does not even address himself to that ques-

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tion. He simply used all three terms interchangeably, thus presupposing at least part of the very question at issue.

Consider the felt tweak when one's shoe pinches, (p. 11). Now if the distinction of inner and outer applies here at all, which can be doubted, this is an *inner* state. If one had to locate the felt tweak, he would locate it in the foot and not somewhere outside it. He would never, for example, point to the head. Further, it is surely a *private* state, in the sense that it can only be felt by him whose shoe is pinching; it cannot be passed around for others to feel, the way the shoe itself, for example, can.

But what do these terribly obvious facts imply with respect to the terribly metaphysical and unobvious distinction of body and mind? They imply nothing whatever. It cannot be said, for example, that this felt tweak, being both inner and private, must be in the mind rather than in the body, for there is nothing in these facts to imply the existence of any mind. Again (which amounts to the same thing) it cannot be said that, being both inner and private, this tweak must be a mental rather than a physical state. For there is nothing here to imply any distinction between mental and physical, even if we assume, as is doubtful, that this is an intelligible distinction.

Surely if one were asked to describe his state of mind, he might use such words as depressed, euphoric, bored, and so on. He certainly would *not* point to his foot, and say that his shoe pinches, this being about as remote from anything anyone would call a mental state as anything that can be imagined. Certainly, if one's foot hurts, this is a state of his foot, not a state of mind. And a foot is a physical object, perfectly public.

"Ah yes, the *foot* is public, but we were talking about a feeling in the foot, namely, that felt tweak when the shoe is too tight. *That* is not something public. *That* is a private, inner feeling. And therefore not a physical state of the foot at all. It must, accordingly, be something mental."

I believe this last paragraph encapsulates a mode of thinking that pervades Sir Alfred's whole discussion, and of course he is not the first to fall under its spell.

To see how inconclusive it is, we need only to see that *any* state of *any* object is an inner, private state. Consider, for example, an iron magnet. Its state of being magnetized is a physical state, as surely as anything is physical; for this only means it is a state of a physical object, and a bar of iron is a physical object. But *where* is that state? Is it an "inner" state of the iron, or not? It is doubtful whether this question makes sense, just as it is doubtful whether it makes sense to ask where feelings are, but if one had to answer it, he would probably say it is in the iron. Certainly it is not somewhere else. Is it a publicly observable state? Of course it is not. Whatever it is about the iron that makes it attractive to iron filings is not something that can be seen, felt, or otherwise directly observed. We can only infer that it is in that state by certain tests. Is it, then, a state which, like a feeling, can be possessed

only by one thing, or can it be transmitted from one bar of iron to another? Here is where it is terribly important not to get muddled. In one sense this state is uniquely possessed by that bar of iron whose state it is, and cannot be transmitted to another bar, but in another sense it is not uniquely possessed, and can be passed along from bar to bar. Thus: If bar A is demagnetized, and bar B is magnetized, we can only say that the first has ceased to be magnetized, and the second has become so. There is no sense in saying that the second bar now possesses the first bar's magnetism, if by this is meant that a state has been passed along *intact* from one thing to another, the way the bar itself might be passed along intact from, say, one person to another. As a matter of logic, a state of a thing can only belong to that whose state it is—it cannot acquire new owners. This is no metaphysical profundity; it is only a matter of understanding the logic of states and properties. Now of course there is another sense in which bar A can be said to lose its magnetism to bar B, just as one object can absorb the heat of another, and so on. But all this means is that, under certain familiar conditions, one thing can acquire the state previously possessed by another, e.g., the state of being magnetized, or warm, or whatnot. In this sense, of course, feelings can be transmitted; for one can surely say that one man can acquire the state previously possessed by another, e.g., the state of being morose, bored, or having a headache. To say that one man cannot have another man's headache is, again, to make no metaphysical point; it is only to call attention to the logic of properties and states.

In what sense, then, does the state of magnetism possessed, by the iron bar, differ from the state of pain, possessed by the man? The crucial difference seems to be this: that the man can know, without inference, that he is in the state, whereas the bar cannot. This, however, calls attention to no difference in kind between the two states. It only calls attention to a very obvious difference between a man and a piece of iron. The reason the piece of iron does not know, without inference, that it is magnetized, is not that the magnetism is a mere physical state of the iron rather than a spiritual state of its soul. It is, rather, that the piece of iron is only a piece of iron, and does not know anything. Surely nothing metaphysical can be gleaned from that meager fact.

I think we can conclude, then, that for anything Sir Alfred has said to the contrary, the tweak in the foot, when the shoe is too tight, (i) is a state of the nerve of a foot, and thus a state of the foot of which that nerve is part, and hence of the man of which that foot is part; and not a state of mind or mental state; (ii) that, being a state of a physical object, namely, the state of a nerve or of a foot or of a man, it is a physical state, this being, indeed, the best definition there is of a physical state; (iii) that it is not a publicly observable state, but neither, for that matter, are many other purely physical states, such as that of being magnetized; (iv) that it is a private state, in the sense that it cannot be passed along intact from one possessor to another, though in that sense all states are

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private; and finally (v) that it differs from certain other physical states in being knowable by its possessor without inference, which points up a difference between certain physical objects, namely, those that can and those that cannot know things, but calls attention to no additional difference between the state of such objects, and in particular to no difference that could be marked by the terms "mental" and "physical."